

Rooming Houses

COMMUNITY UPDATE

In May 2014, five concerned organizations partnered to talk about the state of rooming houses in Winnipeg's inner-city. Together, we released two reports: *Winnipeg's Vanishing Rooming Houses* and *Rooming Houses to Rooming Homes*. These reports found that rooming houses were vanishing due to market pressures, neighbourhood change, fires, and uncoordinated policy and regulatory frameworks. Since that

time, the West Broadway Community Organization (WBCO), Spence Neighbourhood Association (SNA), Daniel McIntyre/St. Matthews Community Association (DMSMCA), Resource Assistance for Youth (RAY), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba (CCPA-MB), and the Institute of Urban Studies (IUS) have argued that in an era of decreasing affordable housing, **saving rooming houses should be a priority.**

What's Happened?

Following the May 2014 forum, The Manitoba government and the City of Winnipeg formed the **Rooming House Task Force** with representation from community organizations and landlords with three core objectives to: *i) Maintain a stable number of affordable housing units within existing rooming house stock; ii) Improve the quality of existing rooming houses; and iii) Create and improve access to supports for rooming house tenants and landlords.*

The Province of Manitoba continues to administer the Rooming House Assistance Program (financial assistance to rooming houses owners for repairs and rehabilitation), maintains a cross-departmental rooming house committee, and now holds a Rooming House Workshop Series for interested parties.

The City of Winnipeg has increased fire and bylaw inspections of rooming houses; clarified student housing, boarder, and rooming house definitions to enhance policy coherence; and partnered with WBCO to pilot the Rooming House Interior Improvement Fund (RHIF).

Neighbourhood Renewal Corporations and Community Organizations continue relationship building work and support services with tenants, caretakers, and rooming house owners.

The SNA focuses on keeping people successfully housed to build rental history. If issues arise, the staff work on issues such as property damage, delayed rent, illegal suite entry, or lack of repairs by landlords. The SNA holds monthly tenants meetings, educational sessions, and continues to work with

landlords as community members to maximize available grants for their properties while assisting them with systems navigation.

Since 2012, WBCO has housed the Rooming House Outreach Program (RHOP). Focused on homelessness prevention, RHOP stabilizes rooming houses and tenancies through relationships, targeted renovations, and resource referrals for tenants and landlords.

The Institute of Urban Studies created a tool for tenants, case managers, community organizations, and property owners to survey the quality of rooming houses and single-room occupancy hotels. This tool allows for informed decisions about unit rentability and whether units can qualify for housing subsidies (See Reverse).

What challenges remain?

Rooming houses are still disappearing from inner-city neighbourhoods due to zoning irregularities and property sales. There is no system in place to keep track of rooming house unit numbers.

Very few programs, incentives, training sessions, penalties, or preservation goals with time frames are in place to ensure stability for rooming house tenants or landlords. Even supporting bed bug treatment may assist houses.

While some initiatives focus on tenant safety, the concerns of female tenants need specific targeting. Female tenants are, by and large, subject to abuse or exploitation when the houses they are in are predominately male.

